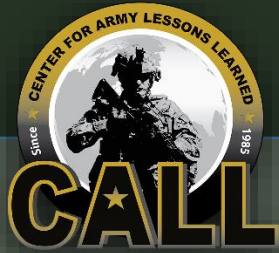


# ***NEWS FROM THE FRONT***



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**The Sacramental Staff Officer**  
**By CH (MAJ) John Mark Sedwick**  
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***“The world is a book, and those who do not travel read only a page.”***  
**Saint Augustine**

As the Plans/Operations Chaplain for Army South, I enjoy the privilege of traveling extensively in Central and South America to coordinate religious support with partner nation Army chaplains during multinational exercises and humanitarian assistance/disaster relief operations, and therefore I have been blessed to read many pages from the metaphorical book that Saint Augustine describes in the above quote. Most recently I accompanied an Army South contingent of approximately 40 personnel to Santiago, Chile to participate as part of the Combined Forces Land Component Commander (CFLCC) element of the multinational exercise, PANAMAX, from 24 July to 7 August 2016. My mission included providing religious support to Army South personnel and, just as importantly, establishing a productive working relationship with a Chilean Army Chaplain to advise the Commander and respond to injects involving religious support at the CFLCC level. My Chilean counterpart, a 62-year-old Roman Catholic priest, fit the description of the prototype partner nation Army Chaplain that I routinely encounter in Central and South America: a dedicated, well-educated, and overworked and multi-tasked servant leader who quite capably fills the sacramental role of bringing God to Soldiers and Soldiers to God, but struggles to embrace the role of a staff officer who advises his Commander on matters of religion, ethics, and morale. And my first challenge during PANAMAX in Santiago, Chile entailed the same challenge I frequently face when interacting

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with partner nation Army Chaplains for the very first time: to convince my counterpart comrade non-combatant that I am also a dedicated, well-educated, and overworked and multi-tasked servant leader who struggles to thread the needle between sacramental and staff officer responsibilities.

CH (MAJ) Gutierrez, who in addition to his duties serving as the Command Chaplain for two Chilean Army divisions, also teaches every evening at a nearby Santiago seminary. I mentioned earlier that Chaplain Gutierrez is well-educated, and he has in fact studied above and beyond the Masters of Divinity level in Germany, in Israel and at the Vatican. He speaks Spanish, Italian and German fluently. CH Gutierrez normally wears a black shirt and white clerical collar as his “uniform,” and spends his days (when not participating in PANAMAX with his wild and crazy Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod counterpart) fighting the rigors of Santiago traffic to visit the Soldiers serving in his two divisions. The Chilean Army Soldiers participating in PANAMAX (and indeed all of the partner nation Soldiers who descended upon Santiago, Chile from Belize, Peru, the United States, Panama, Jamaica, Canada, Guyana, Argentina, Colombia, Brazil, El Salvador, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic) rejoiced at the opportunity to receive a blessing from a Roman Catholic priest on a daily basis as each section from G-1 to G-9 reacted and responded to the stressors of new injects and requirements placed upon them by higher headquarters.

Because all Chilean Army Chaplains are Roman Catholic priests, Chaplain Gutierrez did not know what to expect from a Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod pastor, and he politely but resolutely interrogated me about the value of my Masters of Divinity degree. Upon learning that my seminary education consisted of four years of study (including Hebrew and Greek immersion in order to read the Old and New Testaments in their original languages), he invited me to

participate in a daily morning prayer office for the Soldiers and civilian employees in the PANAMAX headquarters complex. And indeed each morning Chaplain Gutierrez and I would take turns attending the Commanding General's Battle Update Brief (BUB) and offering the Morning Prayer in Spanish to our multinational forces attending PANAMAX. As I have alluded to earlier, Chaplain Gutierrez initially shied away from attending the BUB because he was not accustomed to the role of fielding questions from the Commanding General about religious support. I encouraged Chaplain Gutierrez to take the initiative to brief his general because a Chilean Army Lieutenant General was serving as the Combined Forces Land Component Commander for the first time during PANAMAX, and the daily BUB provided a wonderful opportunity for both the Commander and his Chaplain to grow comfortable in offering and receiving guidance from each other.

Before describing the evolution of this relationship further, it's important to examine the expanding role of the Chilean Army in the hemisphere during the last two decades. Chile has consistently provided a brigade combat team to deploy to Haiti as part of the United Nations sanctioned peace and stability operations there. The Chilean military leadership elected to embrace NATO doctrine after their first deployment to Haiti in order to communicate and operate more efficiently with other partner nation armies serving in this same mission. Their adoption of NATO doctrine impacted all missions conducted by the Chilean Armed Forces, and I experienced their fluency with NATO doctrine firsthand while attending the Command General Staff Officer College (CGSC) at the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC) at Fort Benning, GA from June 2014 to June 2015 with a number of extremely intelligent Chilean Army Officers, including students, instructors and the Deputy Commandant at WHINSEC. Indeed, the Chilean Army commitment to NATO doctrine provided Chaplain

Gutierrez and I with the capability to navigate through some uncharted shoal waters that, up until now, Chaplain Gutierrez had neither contemplated nor confronted.

Prior to the official commencement of PANAMAX (while all participants attended academics training), Chaplain Gutierrez and I received word that we would be part of the J-1 section. It is also common practice in the United States Army to place the Unit Ministry Team (Chaplain and Chaplain Assistant) under the administrative control of the G-1 or S-1, so this development was not a new challenge for me. Therefore, our first task was to politely but firmly explain to the J-1 (a very capable Lieutenant Colonel from Peru) that we did not work for him. Joint Publication 1-05, "Religious Affairs in Joint Operations," describes the Chaplain as a "special staff officer, the chaplain advises the commander and other staff members on moral and ethical decision making, on morale as affected by religion, and personal issues." With the initial challenge of establishing the independent role and relationship of Chaplain Gutierrez with his commander accomplished, the hard work of religious advisement to the commander on a doctrinal matter soon emerged.

Lieutenant General Chamorro, the Chilean Army General who served as the CFLCC, thoroughly appreciated and enjoyed the opportunity to interact with Chaplain Gutierrez and I on a daily basis and displayed a genuine interest in the U.S. Army practice of providing chaplains for many different faith groups. Unfortunately, this "genuine interest" compelled him to announce during an afternoon Commander's Update Brief that his chaplains would provide religious support to displaced civilians who, as part of the exercise, were forced to leave their homes to flee the violence perpetrated by the guerillas who operated in an area adjacent to the Panama Canal. During the BUB that took place the very next morning, I tactfully explained that joint doctrine restricts religious support provided by military chaplains to their military members

and to authorized civilians. I further described the benefit of coordinating religious support with local religious leaders and Non-Governmental Organizations (both of whom would maintain an enduring presence long after our Soldiers had re-deployed). The Chilean Army attorney affirmed the validity of my presentation of joint doctrine, and the matter was settled without further incident.

I included the previous two paragraphs with great fear and trepidation that the reader might infer that PANAMAX served as nothing more than opportunity for Chaplain Gutierrez to learn how to conduct himself in the unfamiliar role of serving as a staff officer. The reality is that I learned just as much from Chaplain Gutierrez as he learned from me. Having graduated from CGSC at WHINSEC and then immediately reporting for duty as the Plans/Operations Chaplain at Army South, I comfortably gravitated towards my duties as a staff officer while failing to adequately acknowledge my sacramental responsibilities to my Soldiers and their family members. In other words, I need to devote just as much time to Word and Sacrament ministry as I presently do to creating the perfect Power Point slide on religious support. While serving as special staff officers, chaplains serving in multinational exercises and operations need to devote equal time to advising the commander and to bringing God to Soldiers and Soldiers to God.